

THINKING LIKE JESUS

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 10-16; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1, 2

Wangaratta, 14/2/16

I've been thinking this week... and so have you! We all spend a lot of our time thinking. In fact, it's hard to think of a time when we're not thinking, except, maybe, when we're asleep. But of course, even then, our brains are often doing something, as evidenced by the rather strange dreams most of us have from time to time. (Some of us do "switch off" mentally, watching television!)

I wonder how many different thoughts we have during the course of a day. How many thoughts have you had already this morning? Of course, not all our thoughts are deep and profound. If we can manage one or two of these a week, we are perhaps doing well! Maybe our thoughts are not as random as we sometimes think. Often, they follow a pattern or a process that we've developed over time, usually unconsciously.

Last week I spoke about some of the dangers we face in our minds, with some of the unhealthy influences around us. I noted some of the resources God makes available to us, to protect our minds and help us direct our thinking. As I thought about these things again this week, there is another very important element, quite unique to us as Christians I really wanted to pick up this morning. And so, I want to go back to basics for a moment, and ask,

I. What Is a Christian?

And I want to try and answer this question progressively. Firstly

A. A Christian Believes in God.

That's fundamental. You can't be a Christian if you don't believe in God. In the best known of our verses from the Bible, Jesus said, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."¹

Nicodemus believed in God, but he wasn't a Christian. As a Pharisee, he came to Jesus at night to discover just what made Jesus different. And in their conversation, Jesus showed Nicodemus that just believing isn't enough. James in his letter says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."² Important as believing in God is, that alone does not make someone a Christian.

B. A Christian Seeks to Follow Jesus.

¹ John 3:16

² James 2:19

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When Jesus called his first disciples, his first words to them were, “Come, follow me,” and he clearly expected them to stop what they were doing, leave it behind and literally, physically follow him.

Following Jesus physically is not an option today. Today, that call to follow him requires a conscious and deliberate effort to cultivate the kind of attitude Jesus had; to respond to situations we encounter the way Jesus would respond if he was in our place; to treat those around us the way Jesus would treat them.

A few years ago now, our Christian young people were challenged to wear a bracelet with the initials WWJD – “*What would Jesus do?*” That’s a great question to ask – for Christians of all ages – to guide us in all of life’s circumstances. As Christians – by definition we’re followers of Christ – we should seek to live the way Jesus lived his life, as an example for us all.

If I believe in God; even if I live much closer to the way Jesus lived than I do currently; that *still* wouldn’t make me a Christian. Being a Christian involves more than lifestyle.

C. God’s Spirit Gives the Christian Life.

What did Jesus say to Nicodemus that night? In spite of Nicodemus’ belief and knowledge of God, and his obvious sincerity in seeking Jesus for answers; something more was needed. Jesus told him, “Nicodemus, you must be born again!”³

I’m sure Nicodemus must have thought to himself, “What on earth is this guy on about?” I’m sure if you asked the average man in the street today, “What makes someone a Christian?” they’d miss the main point too, by a wide margin. It’s not just what we believe, or do; it’s who we are. It’s a brand new life; God’s life, implanted within us.

I’m not surprised Nicodemus struggled to understand it when Jesus explained it to him. “Flesh gives birth to flesh,” Jesus told him, “but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ... You must be born again.”⁴ Some of us have known Jesus’ teaching on this for years, and we still struggle to grasp all he’s saying. This was brand new for Nicodemus. I’m not surprised he struggled!

II. It’s “Supernatural!”

And we live in an age very much tied to the here and now, and to scientific testing. When we talk about being “born again”; or “inviting Jesus into our hearts”; when we actually believe he accepted that invitation, and now lives in us; I’m not surprised when smart,

³ John 3:3, 7

⁴ John 3:6, 7

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educated, sceptical people today look at us as though we've grown an extra head! Or lost the facility to use the one we have!

We're told we live in a pluralist society these days, with all kinds of people believing many different things. I want to note, of Christians and what we believe, there is

A. No Other "Religion" Like It!

Buddhists do not believe the Buddha places his spirit within them. Muslims do not believe that Mohammed, or Allah, places his spirit in them. Hindus... who really understands what Hindus with their many gods believe? I don't! But they don't believe any of their gods would condescend to living within them. That's precisely what our God has done.

Don't believe it when people say all religions teach basically the same thing in different ways. There may be some broad similarities, if you really look for them; but Christianity is fundamentally different. Our God lives within us.

B. No Wonder They Think We're Weird!

They do, you know! They may like us because we're nice, and even grudgingly respect us because we do good things, but they think what we believe and say is weird! I think I understand that. If I stumbled across Christianity and Christians for the first time, without my background, without the years I've spent as a Christian, knowing the influence of God within me as a personal reality; I'd think Christians were weird, too!

We think so differently. I look at a beautiful sunset, or a butterfly, or waves crashing onto rocks, or a spectacular thunderstorm, and I think "My God did that." I read the Bible's account of creation, and then the Fall that introduced sin and its devastation to the world; and I look around me at the world today, and it all makes sense. Someone who isn't a Christian will look at the same world I see, and come to a very different conclusion.

I believe in a God who made all things, a Creator who loves the things he created. When he tells me in his word that he wants those he made in his image to know him, and love him as he loves us; it makes sound, logical sense – to me anyway – that he would send his Son to reveal himself to the world he loves. Apparently, that's nonsense to an atheist! I think they're blind; they think I'm weird.

God loves us so much, he allowed his only Son to die so you and I can be reconciled to him. We're touched profoundly by the extent of his love for us. God then demonstrated his power by raising him back to life; he sent his Spirit, to dwell within his people and empower his church for witness. To me, this is *exactly* what I would expect the God I've come to know to do. And I don't expect someone who is not a Christian to understand this at all.

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I want to ask you to do something this week. Will you take your Grapevines home with you, and read again, maybe several times, the second part of our reading from 2 Corinthians 2, from verses 10 to 16? This is a brilliantly reasoned and set out description of what it means to be a Christian; and why those who don't share our faith, and don't have God's Spirit within them, cannot understand the things that mean so much to us.

No-one knows the deep things of God, like the Spirit of God. God places his Spirit within us, when we come to him in repentance and faith. God's Spirit within teaches us things that are unknowable from any other source. *We have the mind of Christ.* Is it any wonder others don't understand us? And let me say to anyone here who isn't a Christian this morning; there is only so much you can know, as an "outsider", until you take that step of faith, and allow God to implant his Spirit within you.

What happens, what do we find when God places his life within us and it begins to grow? Often, it leads to

C. Inner Turmoil.

Did you see that coming? Did you instead expect me to say God's Spirit within us produces a life of inner peace? Well, it does, too! At times. Some of our old anxieties are taken care of, forever. But that doesn't mean everything is plain sailing!

Now that our children have grown up and left home, there are just two of us sharing our house together. (Lots of people in the house at times, just two of us who live there.) This will probably come as something of a shock to you; but just occasionally, Loris and I will have a disagreement! (This usually happens when for some reason Loris fails to agree that my opinion, or my way of doing something is absolutely right!) I don't know if anything like this ever happens in your household.

Now, if two people sharing a house together sometimes disagree; can you imagine what effect two natures, two minds in the one person will have? God implants his Spirit, his life within us, and we begin to think like Jesus. Also within us is the life given to us by our parents; the life we've known since birth; the nature we've grown accustomed to. Two different natures under the same "roof"! Sometimes they're compatible; sometimes they clash!

The Apostle Paul describes his personal experience of this conflict in Romans 7. He writes of a sinful nature at war with the new spiritual nature God planted within him. Did he enjoy this conflict? Not for a moment! I'm sure many of us can identify this clash of motivations, as the mind of Christ within us objects to things we naturally want to do; and vice versa. Here's how Paul describes his own experience as he wrestled with this dynamic: "What a wretched

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man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”⁵ Don’t be discouraged! God is with us in the turmoil.

How do we manage when these different forces tug us different ways? Who wins? Are you guided by the mind of Christ within you; or are you pulled in another direction?

Let’s note a few of the benefits that come from following

III. The Mind of Christ.

Firstly,

A. It Directs Our Hearts Towards God.

We see this clearly in the life of Jesus. As a twelve year old, Joseph and Mary “lost” Jesus, in Jerusalem, for several days! When they eventually found him, in the temple, he said, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”⁶ When the devil tempted him in the wilderness to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”⁷ Following Jesus through the gospels, his constant motivation was to do the will of God who sent him. He regularly, consistently, sought time with God in prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before they crucified him, we hear him confirm his commitment, in spite of all he knew was about to happen. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as *I* will, but as *you* will.”

This was Jesus’ heart; his mindset. We have the mind of Christ! When we allow his mind to take precedence within us, our hearts, our motivation is to discover and do the will of God.

Giving priority to the mind of Christ within us,

B. (It) Helps Us in Our Relationships with Others.

As the eternal Son of God, Christ’s natural environment was a perfect relationship within the Trinity, with his Father and the Holy Spirit. Outside his natural environment, on earth, we see his exceptional skills in relationship. Whilst his driving passion was the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth, he never pursued this at the expense of people. Quite the opposite. Relationship was the very foundation of God’s Kingdom. When he was asked which was the

⁵ Romans 7:24, 25

⁶ Luke 2:49

⁷ Matthew 4:4

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greatest commandment, Jesus said, "Love God, with the whole of your being; love others as you love yourself." God's Kingdom exists as relationship.

Let me ask you this morning, would thinking the way Jesus thinks help you in *your* relationships? Would thinking his thoughts be a start to healing a damaged relationship?

Finally, having the mind of Christ

C. (It) Motivates Us to Service

I don't need to dwell this morning on Jesus' service record during his time on earth. He literally gave himself away to others, spending his time and energy healing the sick, comforting the sad, feeding the hungry, teaching the slow to learn. All this culminated on the cross, where he gave his life away to rescue others from the consequence of their sin.

Perhaps there's a warning in here for us. If we will allow the mind of Jesus to take over our thinking and thought patterns, we will be prompted to give ourselves away. Some of those things that once loomed large as priorities for us will start to lose their appeal. Maybe we'll end up wondering why we ever thought they were important.

And maybe this would be good for us! It would certainly benefit the Kingdom of God.

Whether we realise it fully or not, we have the mind of Christ within us. Paul describes it very dramatically: "I have been crucified with Christ," he writes to the Galatians, "and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."⁸ Would we describe our relationship with God in terms like that? Paul is very keen to establish which is the dominant force in his thinking. To all intents and purposes, as far as he's concerned, Saul the Pharisee is dead, crucified along with Jesus. The risen Christ is now in charge of Paul's life and his thinking.

He urges us to adopt a similar approach. "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God," he writes to the Romans in chapter 12. And in verse 2 he writes, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed..." How? By the renewing of your minds." Right now, bit by bit, brain cell by brain cell, we're being transformed. What a great thought, for those whose brain cells let them down from time to time!

At college we were taught to take note of the tenses of the verbs in the New Testament; so precise in the original Greek. Always, when Paul refers to the changes taking place within us, he writes in the *present continuous* tense. We *are being* transformed. He writes of the "renewing" of our minds. Look for that "i-n-g" at the end of the verb! It refers to ongoing, continuous action.

⁸ Galatians 2:20

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Each day, subject to our co operation, God by his indwelling Spirit is making us more and more like Jesus. What a tremendous thought! Tomorrow, my thinking will be more like Jesus' thinking than it is today!

Aren't you glad you're a Christian? Let's do all we can, to co operate with God's Spirit and Jesus' mind within us!